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ABSTRACT

In 1977, the Penrose "Whanau House" evolved from a need for new school buildings and an examination of professional needs in secondary education. A group of 25 administrators and personnel affirmed that New Zealand secondary schools should be neighbourhood and comprehensive. Social and community interaction should be stressed, and there should be emphasis on reducing anonymity, on improving teacher-student relationships, and on facilitating teaching and learning through flexibility in teaching approach. To accomplish these goals, the group proposed a home base, called a "Whanau House," which would provide for 250 students. House design consisted of five classrooms, two seminar rooms, a resource room, and a staff planning area grouped around a common room. The house was to be "home" for students and teachers, and teachers were to spend much non-teaching time there. A department commissioned research team is still monitoring the trial because it will take at least three years to collect adequate evidence. There is better and more relaxed contact between students and staff and evidence that learning has improved. Data indicates good student socialization and responsibility. The trial emphasizes the importance of teacher education and preparation for changed roles. Whether building design can induce desired educational practice or merely make good education easier to provide remains to be seen. (CM)

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EDUCATIONAL BUILDING DIGEST 16

UNESCO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EDUCATION IN ASIA AND OCEANIA
BANGKOK, THAILAND

THE NEW ZEALAND 'WHANAU HOUSE' SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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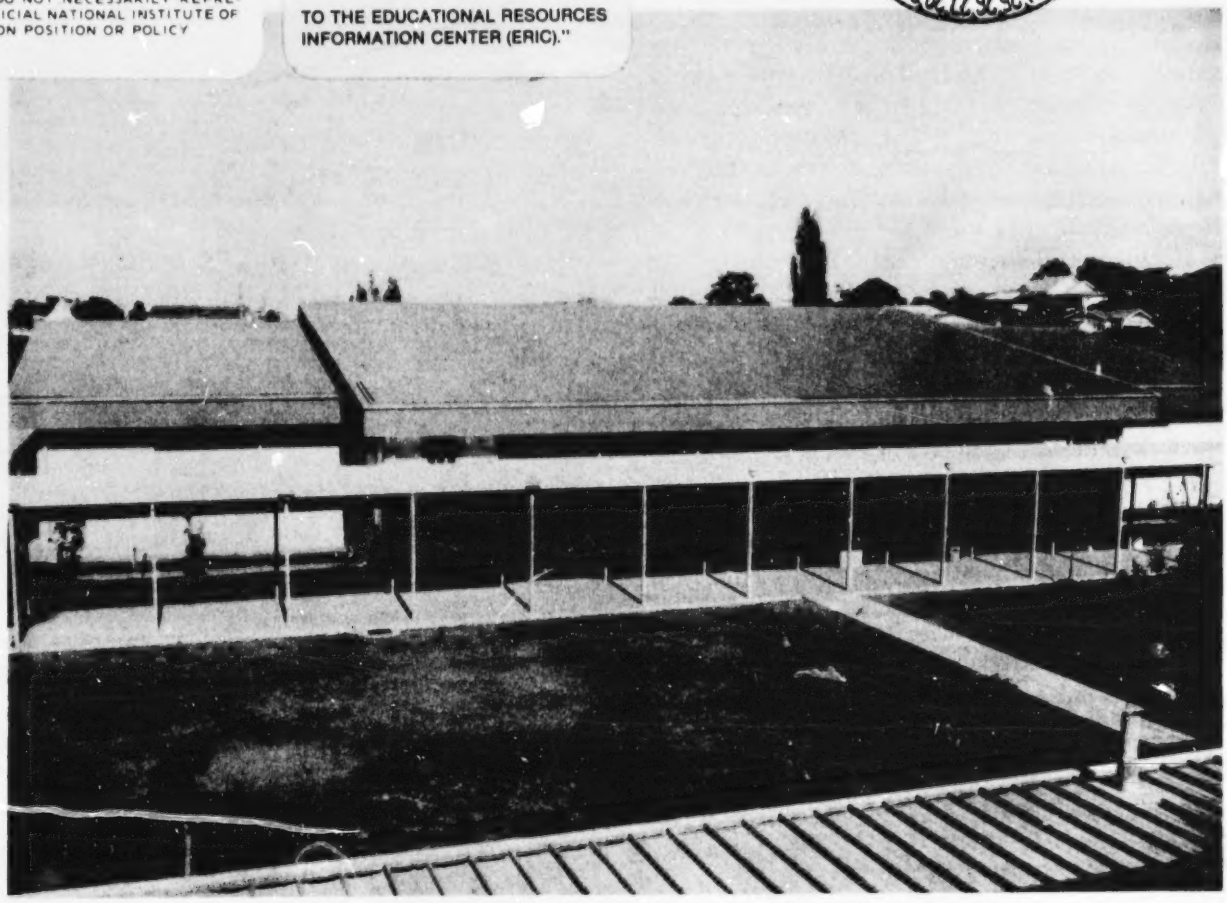


Whanau House

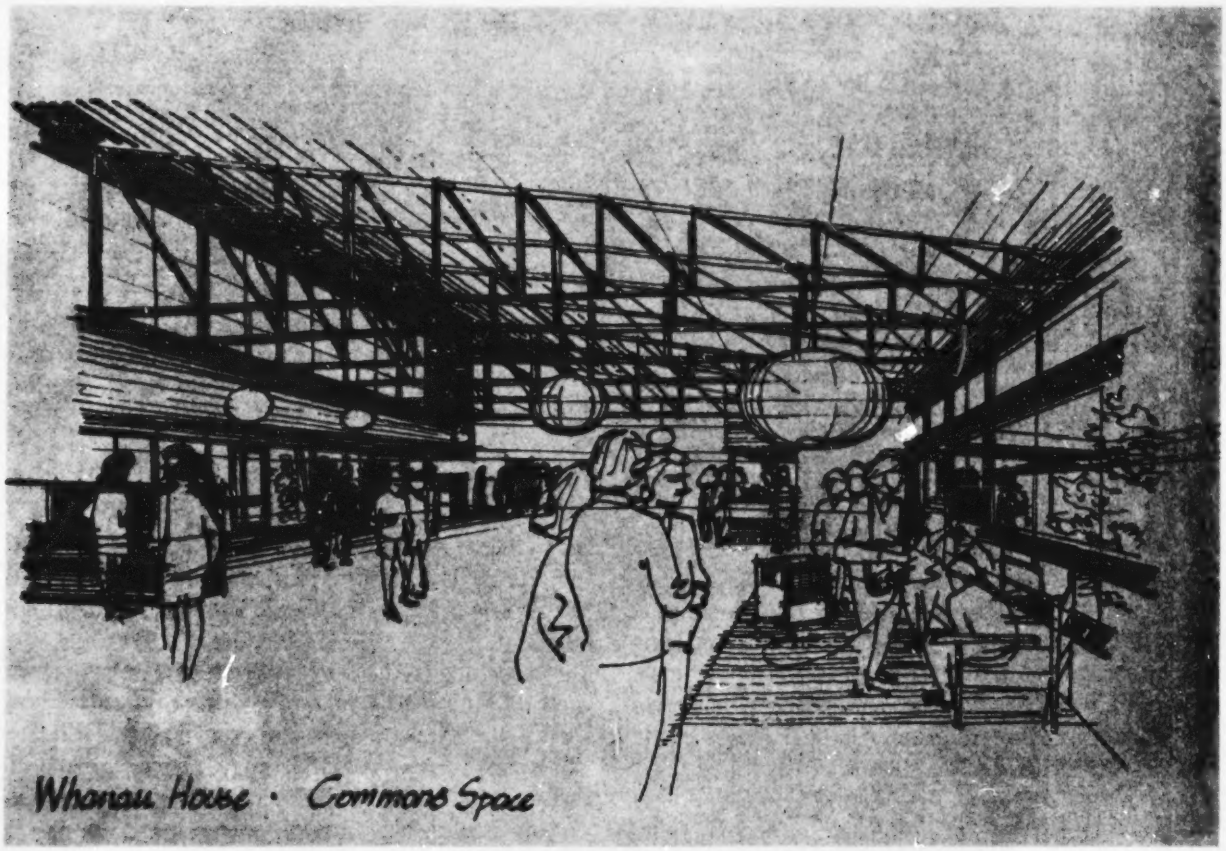
Debate as to the best size for secondary schools is not new. Schools have long explored ways of organizing the total roll in order to reduce anonymity, to improve teacher-student relationships, and to facilitate teaching and learning. By international standards, New Zealand secondary schools—all comprehensives—are not unusually large. Apart from one or two experimental 'big' schools, the largest accommodate between 1,200 and 1,400 pupils. It would appear that, at home and abroad, there is no magical number: principals and teachers most commonly say 'The school was better a few years ago when it was smaller', whether the roll is 500 or 1,500. . .

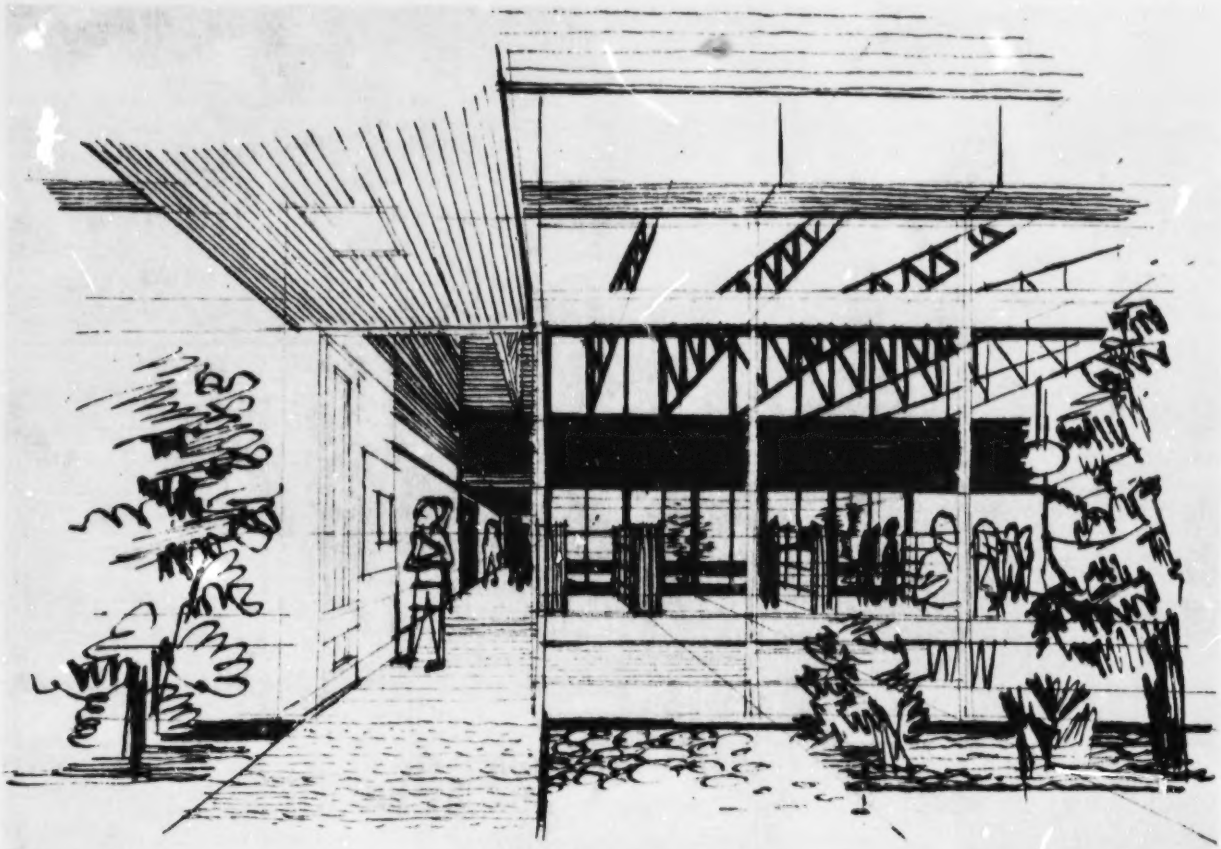
Nevertheless, New Zealand teachers, principals and administrators have for some time attributed many of the problems in secondary education to 'over-size', whatever that may mean. It would appear that this has to do with organization as much as physical dimension.

In 1974 an opportunity to examine the issue arose when the Department of Education, with its planning agent the Ministry of Works and Development, was faced with the need to build schools more quickly than was possible with existing plans and procedures. Steady population growth with its accompanying demand for new schools was recognized by high investment in education, but for a variety of reasons building programmes suffered serious delays. Existing schools experienced unplanned expansion by the addition of temporary prefabricated classrooms which lacked the additional service facilities of permanent buildings. The need to explore new building and programming systems was pointed out by Tom Howarth, Head of Buildings Development and Peter Boag, Director of Secondary Education. They saw in the need a unique opportunity to combine the search for new building systems—an architectural and technical demand—with a critical examination of professional needs in secondary education. Accordingly, 25 people conferred for a week—senior departmental officers, deputy principals and principals, university and teachers' colleges staff, primary and secondary inspectors. Their mandate was challenging:
"Produce a professional brief so that architects can design a school for now and the future."

Constrained to reach consensus and forbidden to essay architectural solutions, the group produced a definition of a school which in its emphasis on quality of life was in accord with the prevailing climate of optimism in education and at large. (It is interesting to speculate what the brief may have sought in the period of retrenchment which soon followed, with rapid levelling in population growth and reduction of the building programme). The definition which introduced the brief can be summarized as follows. Tomorrow's secondary school should:

1. Be a 'caring and sharing' institution, responsive to the educational and social needs of all its inhabitants;
2. Have a give-and-take relationship with its community, serving it directly and indirectly, and employing its diverse resources;
3. Provide a congenial setting in which children, teachers, parents and others can, for mutual benefit, co-operate;
4. Accordingly, provide an environment suitable for adults and children to undertake individual, small-group, and large-group work;
5. Insofar as environment can do so, be conducive to "spontaneity and belonging—the anti-thesis of boredom, regimentation and alienation,"





Whanau House Entrance

6. Enable each student to "develop insights, knowledge and experience so that he can understand himself and the people he lives and works with in both the small and larger community, and to make the most of what he can do personally that is unique and vital to him. Dignity and self-esteem are essential to every human being." [1]

This definition would have been merely a generalized, fulsome statement of much prevailing educational philosophy had it not been extended in a detailed spelling-out of practical implications; i.e., tasks and roles of pupils, teachers and administrators, desirable territorial dispersement; and conditions needed for effective social interaction. The brief in total affirms that New Zealand secondary schools should be neighbourhood, comprehensive schools which permit flexibility of teaching approach and which place a value on social and community interaction.

The architects' initial interpretations of the brief were submitted to a second conference of the professional group. At this stage the group had to defend its propositions within a proposed architectural setting, constrained by strict demand that the new school cost no more, and possess no greater area than existing designs. The developed design was described later by Howarth:

> **The philosophy behind the new design was that, irrespective of the total roll of the school, it was desirable to group pupils in smaller numbers. A home base, called a *'Whanau* House' was proposed which would provide an environment for 250 pupils. It consisted of five classrooms and two seminar rooms grouped around a common room, together with a resource room and a staff planning area. The plan was to be as flexible as possible to allow for any type of school organization.[2]**

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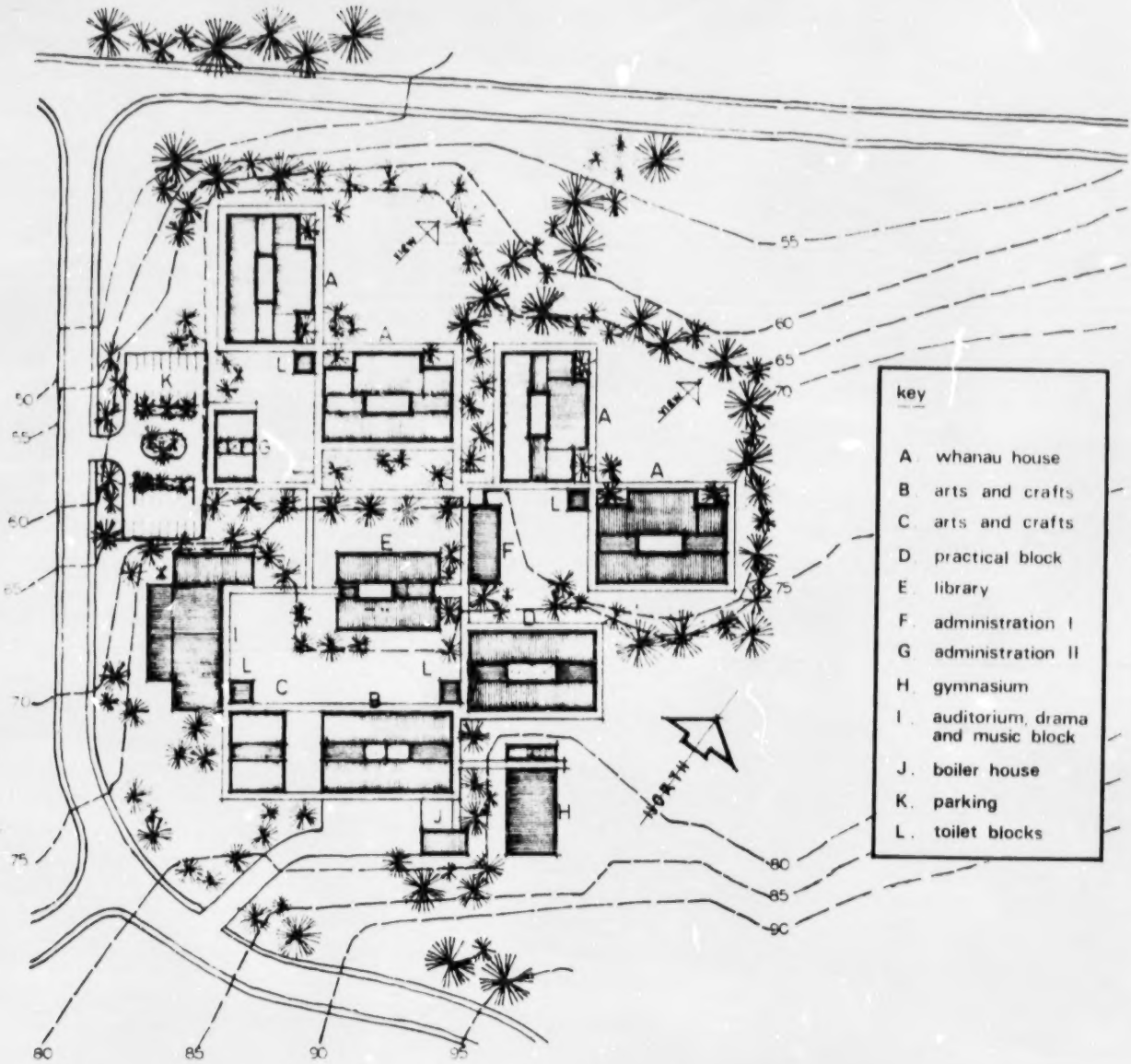
1. A full statement, together with an elaboration of the architect's task and a projected solution, is set out in the Department of Education and Ministry of Works and Development publication ***Secondary Schools for Tomorrow,*** 1975.

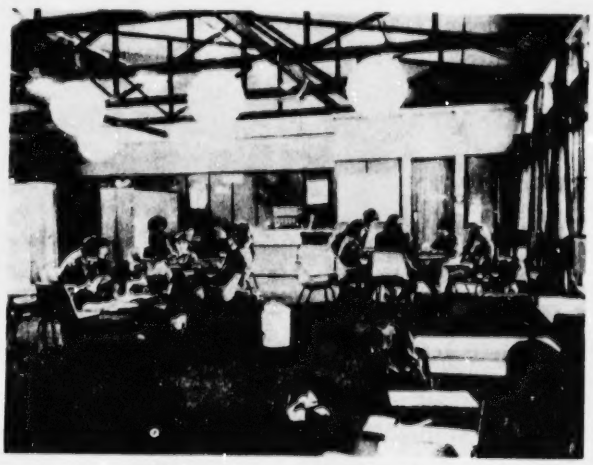
2. The Maori word ***Whanau,*** in its simplest interpretation, means 'the extended family'; it means, too, a proper regard for the welfare of all members of that extended family.



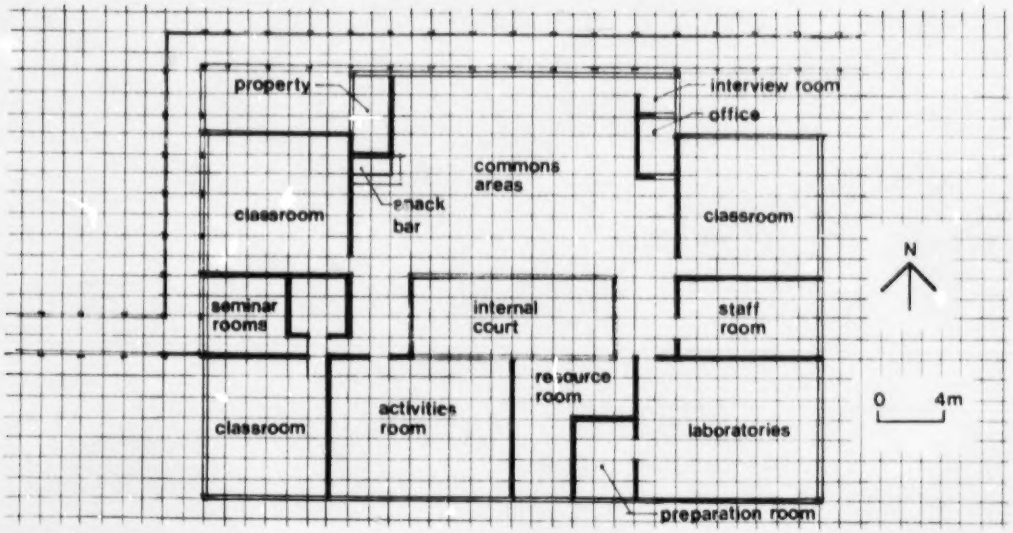
A completed school would comprise no more than five Whanau House blocks. There would be as well two administrative blocks, the first for senior administrators and professional staff, the second for service personnel, resource preparation, guidance and health care. There would be two arts-and-crafts blocks, a practical block, library, gymnasium, dance and drama block, and auditorium. The house concept is not new. The new design, however, puts forward for New Zealand some markedly different characteristics of school design and programming:

a) Scope for a school to grow, house by house;

b) Careful anticipation of growth, so that final form can be anticipated and sites prepared accordingly;



Whanau House Common Room



c) Elimination of all internal corridors: the space saved enables provision of commons areas in each Whanau House;

d) Use of off-site, modular construction to reduce building time and inflation of costs;

e) A starting point of a ***declared*** educational philosophy;

f) A firm stand on house size—whereas, traditionally, houses were organizational units often embracing from 400 to 600 students, the Whanau House accommodates not more than 250 students;

g) The house is 'home' for students and teachers. General staff facilities are provided but staff are expected to spend a good percentage of non-teaching time at 'home';

h) Commons space was the prerogative of senior students in some larger schools; it is now an essential condition for all;

i) The removal of the 'no-man's-land' effect of corridor schools. The house is literally akin to a domestic dwelling with its communal living room and its private and service rooms opening from it.

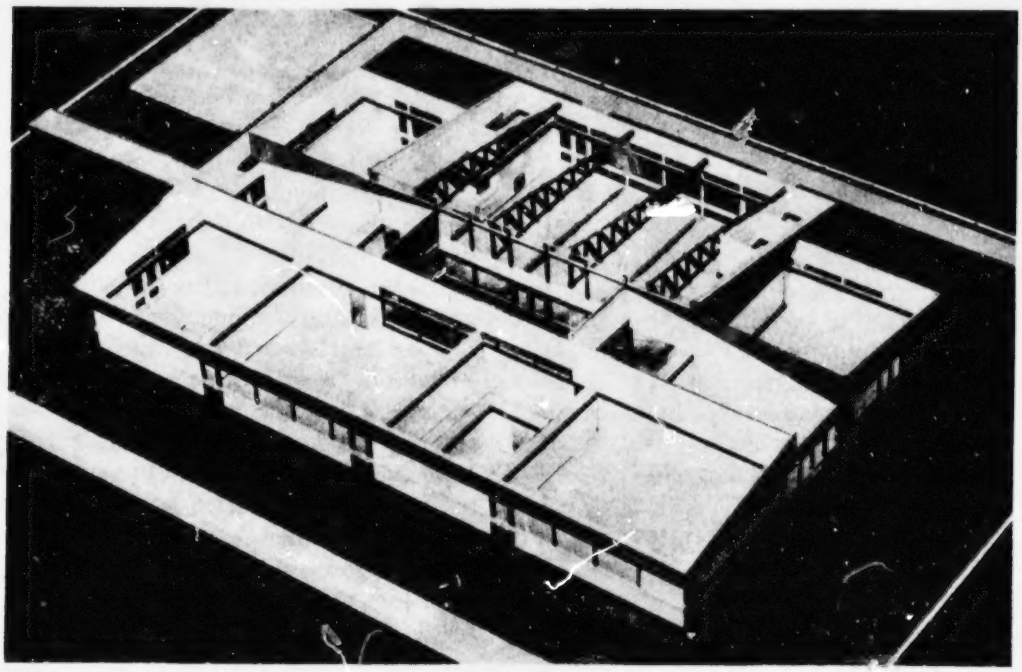
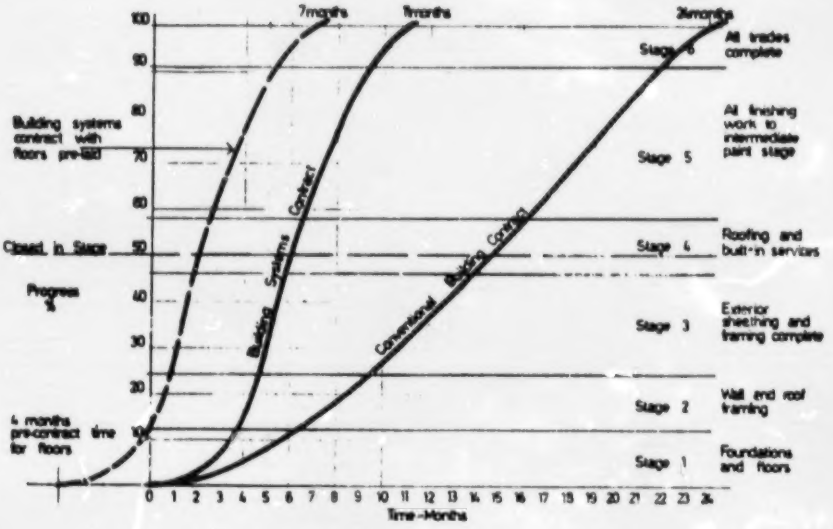
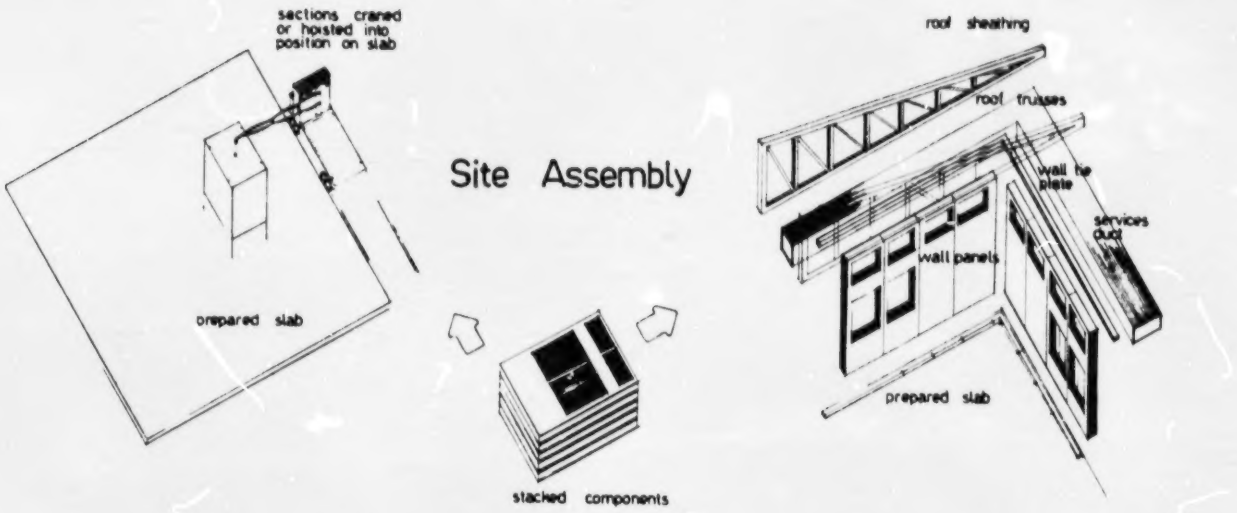


Photo of model

Building Contract - Typical Progress of Stage 1 School





Little attention has been given in this account to the building system envisaged. The off-site and industrialized modular panel system was seen as having very considerable advantages in direct cost savings, once the industry was established; in reduction of skilled labour required for production and assembly; for off-site pre-fabrication of buildings in remote rural areas; and for stockpiling possibilities for economic weather use in a highly variable climate. It is not yet possible to provide evaluations of these factors at this developmental stage. To test the building system, however, it was decided to erect a trial house.

This trial offered an interesting opportunity not only to test a construction system, but to examine educational function. To this end, a house was erected at a well-established city secondary school, Penrose High School, Auckland. There were from the outset a number of important issues raised in terms of educational and social effect. How could a single unit be given any adequate educational evaluation when associated with an established 'main' school operating on traditional organization? Would such a unit become either an 'elitist' or 'disadvantaged' sector in the eyes of the rest of the school? Could staff members effectively divide their allegiance between established responsibilities and the special and localized demands of the Whanau house? Would the determination to succeed of staff volunteering to work in the unit provoke too prejudicial a 'Hawthorn' effect?

Such implications of a trial were put to the principal and staff. Although the department hoped that the unit would be run along the lines intended by the original brief, it in no way obligated the principal to operate in this way. If he so determined, the unit became simply the permanent room replacement for existing temporary accommodation. The principal was, however, enthusiastic about the educational concept, he had already in his school accented social, cultural and academic guidance and promotion of individual identity. He encouraged the staff responsible for the unit by providing planning time prior to its opening in 1977. Parent meetings were called to discuss the purposes of the unit.

A research team from Massey University was commissioned by the department to monitor the trial. Several techniques were to be employed:

1. Descriptive study of the evolution of the design and its professional brief;
2. Descriptive study by the trial unit teaching staff of its planning, organization and staffing;
3. Observational study of the ways teaching and learning is carried out, together with an investigation of the ways students and teachers see themselves operating;
4. Space-use by observation and questionnaire: access, communication, reactions to environment;
5. Educational effects: comparative performances of house and 'main school' students;
6. Impact study: effects on school, parents and wider community.

The trial is now in its third year. The research is still under way, and it is too early to draw definitive conclusions. It becomes increasingly clear that at least a three-year cycle is desirable for the collection of adequate evidence. In that time new entrants in 1977 will have moved to senior levels, where subject options and specializations require that their study occurs in the main school as much as in the house. Students will have not only 'settled' to the new environment, but will have had to deal with inevitable staff changes, with the implications for training and reorientation to the house environment. Students who were seniors in 1977 will be able to provide some feedback, some 'hindsight' to balance the possible euphoric excitement of being selected to live in 'the new house'.

It also becomes clear that the trial is very much one of the ***Penrose*** Whanau house unit, as a particular phenomenon. It is in no real way a test of the concept of a Whanau house school. Nevertheless some factors emerge which throw light on educational effect. The staff of the house gave a very considerable amount of time, professional and private, to planning the operation of the unit along the lines intended by the original brief. As yet, some of that planning has not been implemented, particularly in the area of related studies and across-form-levels activity. There are sound reasons for this. In particular the deliberate shift which staff have tried to make towards shared time with pupils in non-directed time, towards the development of a sense of house identity, and the very considerable exposure they have suffered through a constant stream of visitors to the unit represent a considerable initial demand on professional and personal energy and resources. They can cope, they discover, with only so much change at a time, and change in attitude and behaviour towards students is perhaps the most demanding change of all.

Whanau House Common Room

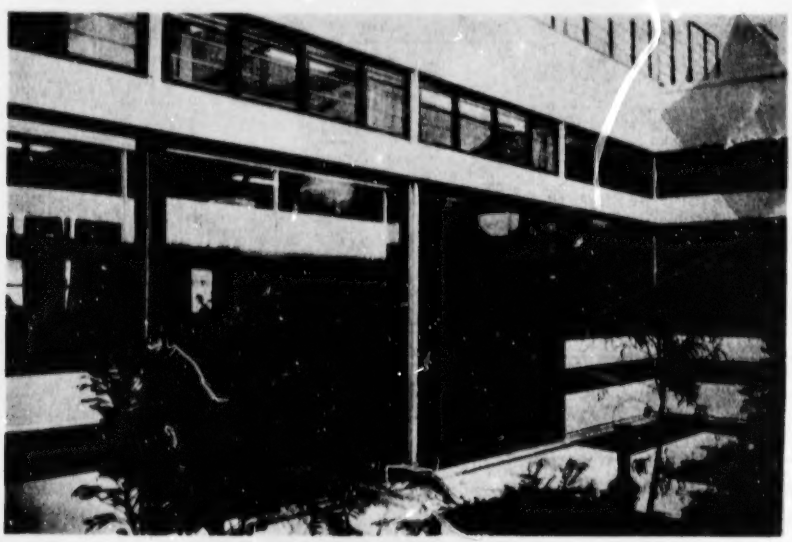
Thus, teachers now say "things really aren't much different—I don't think I've changed much at all." Students tend at this stage, too, to take life in the house for granted. "It's just school." (There is, under pressure, nevertheless, a discernible pride in belonging to the house).

This apparent ***status quo*** of teachers' and students' attitudes must be set alongside some of the information available from the observation and interview research. Students, for example, persist in their admiration of and care for their 'own' environment. They speak, too, of better and relaxed contact with staff: "they are easier to meet and talk to." In fact it would appear that while teachers and students do not perceive large changes, life in the house is subtly and perhaps importantly different from what it used to be at school. In the teacher's mind, ***teaching*** is much the same, but there is evidence that ***learning*** has in broad terms improved.

If absentee figures, and participation in the wider school life and extra-curricular activity are indicators, the students in the house rate well in socialization and responsibility.

If the trial has proven to be of a particular incident at this school rather than of the design concept, then it must be noted that some of the anticipated difficulties have become real. There *is* some friction between pupils and staff of the house, and the main school. The well-intentioned desire of the principal to give the trial a fair test has in itself imposed organizational and administrative strain upon the whole school. Perhaps this is not a bad thing. The school has now reorganized into a house system, and is looking hard at timetabling which will provide flexibility and continuity houses.

This trial should not overshadow the whole project. Two new schools to the new design are under construction. Will they evolve in the ways the planners intended? The Penrose trial emphasizes the importance of teacher education and training for changed roles, no matter how small or obvious such changes may appear. Will the new schools positively assist by their environment the development of desired changes? Or will they prove merely one more set of classrooms? Can building design induce desired educational practice? Or do 'good' buildings merely make 'good' education easier to provide?



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